

STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWA
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

Volume 5 | Number 4 (1902)

pps. 310-312

Characteristic Letter By Gov. Kirkwood

ISSN 0003-4827

Material in the public domain. No restrictions on use.



This work has been identified with a [Creative Commons Public Domain Mark 1.0](https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/).

Recommended Citation

"Characteristic Letter By Gov. Kirkwood." *The Annals of Iowa* 5 (1902), 310-312.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.2775>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](https://iowaresearchonline.org/)

pathies of all humane and Christian people. This is a home—consisting of a beautiful 80-acre farm and comfortable buildings—for discharged convicts from our penitentiaries, a temporary resting-place, where they can safely abide until permanent employment can be secured for them. A condition can scarcely be imagined more forlorn than that of a convict during the first few weeks succeeding his discharge from a term of imprisonment. He is an object of universal distrust, and it is little wonder that so many of them, failing to obtain employment, keep on the down grade and again bring up in the penitentiary. Mr. Coffin's plan contemplates welcoming them to this pleasant home, where light employment can be had, and where, under the influence of Christian teaching they can be aided and encouraged to lead better lives—in short, "to be saved to themselves and the State." At this writing the building is enclosed and on the way to completion. It will doubtless be ready for its good work early in the spring. There are many details relating to this undertaking, which we have no space to recount, but it is so far advanced that its success is assured. In fact, Mr. Coffin never takes a backward step in any good work. We understand that many convicts in our penitentiaries, whose terms will expire the present year, are already looking ahead with high hopes of finding a resting-place and encouragement until they can make a new start in life from the home so wisely and generously provided for them by Mr. Coffin. This place of rest is near his own home—in fact, a part of his celebrated Willow-Edge Farm.

CHARACTERISTIC LETTER BY GOV. KIRKWOOD.

The original copy of the following letter was recently presented to the State Historical Department by Mr. H. W. Lathrop, author of the "Life and Times" of our late War Governor. It has been published heretofore, and possibly

more than once. It was written to his nephew, Samuel Kirkwood Clark, son of Hon. Ezekiel Clark, who "went to live with his uncle almost from the time of leaving his cradle." The young man enlisted November, 1861, in the 4th Iowa Cavalry, but was afterwards promoted to first lieutenant and adjutant of the 25th Iowa Infantry. He received a mortal wound at the battle of Arkansas Post, Jan. 11, 1863, from which he died on the 20th of February. It is one of the excellent, fatherly letters written by the illustrious War Governor to the boy, full of sensible advice to its recipient, and boys of these later times may well profit by the sensible advice it contains. It is with pleasure that we transfer it to the pages of THE ANNALS:

EXECUTIVE CHAMBER,
DES MOINES, IOWA, Jan. 29, 1860. }

Dear Kirk: I have been so busy that I have not found time to write you until to-day. I do not want you to fail to write to me because I do not answer all your letters. One object for wishing you to write to me is to have you improve in writing by practice.

When your father was here he related to me a conversation he had had with your teacher which gave me great pleasure. Your teacher says you are well behaved and gentlemanly in your deportment as a scholar, diligent and attentive as a student, of clear head and strong mind, and that you occupy, to a great extent, the position of leader among your fellow students.

You can hardly understand how much I was gratified to hear this, because I think you cannot understand the kind and extent of the interest I feel in your progress in life and your welfare. The character given you by your teacher goes far towards making up the character of the true man.

Allow me to give you a word of warning. If it be so that you occupy, to some extent, the position of leader or umpire among your fellows, that position has not only its pleasures and advantages, but its dangers and difficulties. You must not allow yourself to become proud and overbearing. You must not use your position to put down any one who is weaker than yourself, either mentally or physically, but rather to support and defend such—in short, you must use your influence to see that "the right" is done at all times and under all circumstances, and you must not allow anything to make you flinch from seeing it done. You must not be quarrelsome. Avoid all personal difficulties, if possible, but if compelled to engage in such, then so bear yourself that your adversary will not wish to come in contact with you again. No man is fit to control others who cannot control himself.

Will you allow me to say a few words to you about smoking. I don't

intend to scold. You are too old to be scolded. You are old enough to be argued with—in short, you are in feeling, if not in years, a man. Your Aunt Jane [Mrs. Kirkwood] has scolded you for smoking. She made a mistake in so doing, but you should not feel angry with her so doing, because in what she did she acted for what she thought your good. She has borne much for and from you. You should bear much for and from her. I do not intend to scold you about smoking. I do not intend to ask you to quit smoking as a personal favor to myself, because this might look like trying to use a personal influence with you. I intend merely to reason the matter with you. A perfect man, aside from all questions of religion and morals, is a man who has a sound mind in a sound body. Now, smoking injures both mental and physical health, weakens both mind and body. Examine and see if this is not so. Talk with medical men and those who are not medical, on the subject; read books that treat of it; then if you find the facts to be as I have stated, determine what you should do. Have you not the courage to do what is right and necessary for your health? The habit with you is new and therefore more easily broken. Think of all this and write me what you think.

I send you a copy of my inaugural address. It is praised by some of my party friends and denounced by some of my party enemies. You are neither one or the other. Write me just what you think about it. Write me what you think about all these things. Take your time to do so, half a dozen evenings if necessary, and a half a dozen sheets of paper, if necessary. I will read it all. You are at entire liberty to show this to your father, if you want to talk about it with him, and I think it would be well for you to do so. He may help you to read it; perhaps his help may be necessary.

Very truly, your friend and affectionate uncle,

S. J. KIRKWOOD.

ANOTHER PORTRAIT OF GOVERNOR KIRKWOOD.

Mrs. Catharine M. Adams who resides three or four miles southwest of the capitol, has presented to the Historical Department an oil portrait of Gov. Samuel J. Kirkwood, painted by her uncle, Marshall Talbot, an artist who resided in Des Moines during the civil war. In the opinions of most people who knew the war governor, it is an excellent likeness of him at that time. It has been varnished and otherwise put in repair, without, however, changing the work of the artist in any respect. There has been no attempt at "restoration." We consider this painting a valuable acquisition to the treasures of the State Historical Art Gallery.

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.